UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/51/63
7 February 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fifty-first session

ASSISTANCE IN MINE CLEARANCE

Letter dated 6 February 1996 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit, enclosed herewith, the positions of the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the issue of mine clearance.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under the agenda item entitled "Assistance in mine clearance".

(Signed) Vladislav JOVANOVIĆ
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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ANNEX

Positions of the Government of Yugoslavia on mine clearance

The Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia welcomes the Secretary-General's report on assistance in mine clearance (A/50/408) and the corresponding resolutions of the General Assembly (resolutions 50/70, 50/74 and 50/82), as well as all other measures taken on the international level to that effect, within the United Nations in particular. This undoubtedly demonstrates the full awareness of the international community of the gravity and complexity of the problem and represents an important contribution to the further promotion of the comprehensive international action to find an effective solution.

As a State party to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia remains fully committed to the comprehensive ban on all types of mines and expresses readiness to render its contribution to that end.

With no intention to diminish the importance of the comprehensive prohibition of anti-personnel mines in any way, the Yugoslav Government wishes to draw attention to the following:

1. The present level of development of mines and other explosive devices and the use of a new generation of mines, even by the international forces, indicate the prospects of their more extensive use in armed conflicts. This was clearly demonstrated when the Krajina airport Udbine was bombed by forces of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1994.

2. It is widely acknowledged that, owing to their specific nature, mines pose a serious danger to the civilian population, and increasingly to the United Nations peace-keeping forces. This was duly reflected in the Secretary-General's report as well as during the debate in the General Assembly on the occasion of the adoption of the above-mentioned resolutions.

Mines are just as destructive as any other lethal weapon. The fact is that the most lethal for civilians are the anti-personnel mines and the so-called surprise mines. However, the resolution as well as the Secretary-General's report deal only with the anti-personnel mines that are used primarily against enemy armed forces, which are superior as a rule. Thus, the prohibition only of classical anti-personnel mines would lead to the furthering of the inferiority of small countries and of their armed forces' capability in exercising their defence activity in their own territories.

3. Restricting the prohibition only to the classical mines that are planted in the ground leaves a vast possibility for the developed and militarily powerful countries, which possess the newest generation of mines deployed by remote control, some of which are even implanted in bombs and missiles, to enhance their superiority.

4. In dealing with this problem, the Yugoslav Government considers that it is necessary first to define on the international level what categories of explosive devices are to be considered as mines, to classify them according to their types and subsequently to discuss the scope of use of certain types of mines or even the comprehensive prohibition of mines in general.

The Yugoslav Government expresses its readiness to make available its experts as part of an international team to work out a common definition.

5. The Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia avails itself of this opportunity to reiterate that no mines have been planted in its territory except those used by the Army of Yugoslavia exclusively for training purposes within its training grounds and under a very strict control regime.